

University of Montana

ScholarWorks at University of Montana

Graduate Student Theses, Dissertations, &
Professional Papers

Graduate School

1953

Aspects of the comic spirit in Meredith's "Modern Love"

Robert Gerald Ross

The University of Montana

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.umt.edu/etd>

Let us know how access to this document benefits you.

Recommended Citation

Ross, Robert Gerald, "Aspects of the comic spirit in Meredith's "Modern Love"" (1953). *Graduate Student Theses, Dissertations, & Professional Papers*. 1610.
<https://scholarworks.umt.edu/etd/1610>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate School at ScholarWorks at University of Montana. It has been accepted for inclusion in Graduate Student Theses, Dissertations, & Professional Papers by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks at University of Montana. For more information, please contact scholarworks@mso.umt.edu.

ASPECTS OF THE COMIC SPIRIT
IN MEREDITH'S "MODERN LOVE"

by

ROBERT GERALD ROSS

B. A., Lewis and Clark College, 1952

Presented in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

MONTANA STATE UNIVERSITY

1953

Approved by:

Edmund L. Freeman
Chairman, Board of Examiners

J. B. Casale
Dean, Graduate School

Aug 17 1953
Date

UMI Number: EP35870

All rights reserved

INFORMATION TO ALL USERS

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.



UMI EP35870

Published by ProQuest LLC (2012). Copyright in the Dissertation held by the Author.

Microform Edition © ProQuest LLC.

All rights reserved. This work is protected against
unauthorized copying under Title 17, United States Code



ProQuest LLC.
789 East Eisenhower Parkway
P.O. Box 1346
Ann Arbor, MI 48106 - 1346

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
INTRODUCTION.	1
Chapter	
I. THE PLOT OF "MODERN LOVE" AND MEREDITH'S BASIC THEMES	4
II. THE HUSBAND IN "MODERN LOVE" AS A COMIC CHARACTER	16
III. THE HUSBAND'S FAILURE TO SEE THE COMIC.	30
CONCLUSION.	36
APPENDIX.	37
BIBLIOGRAPHY.	54

INTRODUCTION

George Meredith's period of literary production extended from 1849 until his death in 1909. His main works were eight volumes of verse and fourteen novels, and a considerable number of uncollected poems and an unfinished novel, published posthumously. Pervading most of this work are two major themes: the conflicts in the social relations between men and women, and the Comic Spirit.

The first of these themes, the concern with the conflicts and problems of men and women, appears throughout his writing from The Ordeal of Richard Feverel, 1859, to Celt and Saxon, posthumously published in 1910. In this body of material he shows repeatedly his belief that the conflicts in society rise mainly from people's failure to exercise enough intellectual control over their actions. Whenever they are not guided by their brains, their actions become foolish and erratic, and lead into strife. The second theme, the Comic Spirit, supplies a means of resolving the conflict. The Comic Spirit is an attitude of objective detachment which enables a person to see foolishness in his acts, and to correct them.

"Modern Love," Meredith's longest poem, deals obviously

with the first of these themes, in its treatment of the break-up of a marriage. The material of the poem apparently has some autobiographical roots. Meredith was married, when quite young, to the daughter of T. L. Peacock. In 1858, after several years of marriage, she left him for another man. When she returned and sought a reconciliation, he refused to see her. "Modern Love" was written in the months immediately following her death, in 1861.

Because of the biographical parallel in the matter of the poem, the general disposition of critics has been to treat it, as one critic says, as "the outcome of his own domestic difficulties--"¹ or, according to another, as a summing up of "the thoughts of life suggested to him by his own bitter experience of passionate love and its frustration by contact with a workaday world."² The husband is interpreted as a noble and intelligent man married to a woman who is inferior to him both in intellect and spirit. He is seen as a tragic figure, beaten down and defeated by forces greater than himself. Often, the attitudes expressed by the husband are accepted as being those of Meredith.

I believe that these criticisms are, for the most part, inadequate and incomplete, because they do not consider

¹ Lionel Stevenson, "George Meredith," Darwin Among the Poets. (Chicago, 1932) p. 190.

² John William Cunliffe. Leaders of the Victorian Revolution. (New York, London, 1934) p. 210.

the second of Meredith's major themes, the Comic Spirit. This failure to include the Comic Spirit in interpreting the poem can be accounted for by the many difficulties of both manner and matter which are present. Meredith, himself, says that the poem "could only be apprehended by the few who would read it many times."³

The manner in which the material is handled presents major reading problems. The story is presented from two quite different points of view, that of the poet and that of the husband. The poet is an objective, omnipresent observer of the action; the husband is a highly subjective actor, who gives his view of his marital breakup. Although the transition from poet to husband is often difficult to follow, the distinctions between them must be kept clearly in mind,⁴ as their attitudes, I believe, are almost diametrically opposed.

In this paper I shall attempt to show that the actions of the husband in "Modern Love" are Comic, not tragic, and that his Comic attitudes, not some force outside him, are responsible for the tragedy. To this end, I shall first give a brief paraphrase of the poem. Then I shall outline Meredith's total philosophy, to show the position in this matrix of the Comic Spirit. Finally, I shall turn to the text of "Modern Love" to demonstrate there the action of Comic elements important in the final tragedy.

³ George Meredith, The Works of George Meredith, vol. 28: Letters. (New York, 1909) p. 156.

⁴ The passages by the poet as observer are indicated in the text of the poem, in the appendix of this paper.

CHAPTER I

THE PLOT OF "MODERN LOVE" AND MEREDITH'S BASIC THEMES

"Modern Love" is composed of fifty sixteen-line "sonnets."¹ The plot matter of the poem deals with the breakup of a marriage. The poet speaks first, setting a scene of suspicion and anger. The couple are estranged, and the wife has turned to another man for companionship. Realizing this, the husband rages against her. They are both confused by the conflict which has sprung up between them.

The husband still feels drawn to her despite his anger and jealousy. He² tries to find joy in other ways, but fails. He asks what he has done to cause her to turn from him, and decides that their early love was just a dream, and now he is awake. Madam has killed their love, he says, and made a mockery of their happy past.

¹ They are not, strictly speaking, sonnets, but from the time that Swinburne referred to them as such in a letter to The Spectator, June 7, 1862, the term has been in common use.

² Throughout, "he" refers to the husband, "Madam" to the wife, and "My Lady" to his friend.

My Lady attracts him briefly, and Madam is jealous. He says that he does not want a love based on jealousy, and he rejects her. In all of this bitter conflict, they maintain a happy front in society and admire each other's hypocrisy when their guests suspect nothing.

His attempts to resolve the struggle within himself are complicated by his discovery of a "wanton-scented tress" where he had put it long ago. He realizes for a moment that he too needs forgiveness for some things.

At times she wants to tell him something of her feelings but she is afraid and busies herself with household things to hide her feelings. Although he knows her fear, he will not help her. Finally she comes to him and he sees this as an act of penance, but he rejects her again. Still, he finds it hard to do, and must call on his pride for justification.

He muses on the serpent in him which once was Love. If Madam would confess, he might forgive; otherwise she must expect the serpent. He deliberately begins a flirtation with My Lady so that he can revenge himself and so that her beauty will reflect credit on him. He sees that My Lady does not love him, and blames Madam that he has lost the power to win a woman's love. However, he accepts My Lady's companionship. She is intelligent, has common sense, and he tries to believe that she can give him happiness, but slowly sees that she cannot.

Again Madam wants to talk with him in an attempt to reach some understanding, but again he remains aloof and rejects her. Although he knows that Madam is sensitive and that his rebuffs are partially responsible for the failure to reach any reconciliation, he tells My Lady, when she advises him to return to Madam, that he could do this only through pity, and Madam deserves no pity. My Lady accepts his plea to be allowed to remain with her, and they stroll. They see Madam with the man, and his conflict returns; he realizes that he is still attracted to Madam.

Their mutual jealousy brings them together again, united by pity rather than love. They are not happy, until, by accident, the barriers between them are broken. He finds her talking with the other man, presents his arm, and she accepts it. Before she can offer any explanation, he tells her that he has a firm belief in her. From this they regain a little of their old closeness, but they have only a little time of joy together. When My Lady is mentioned, Madam leaves, thinking he still loves My Lady. He calls out against this action in which he feels her "sense is with her senses all mixed in,"

This ends the husband's monologue. The poet returns, in the last two sonnets, to close the tale. The husband finds his wife, and for a time she tries to believe that his old love for her has returned, but she fears that it might not be so. In the night he hears her call to him, and goes to

her, Afraid, and weak in her fear, she has killed herself.

This, then, is the story of "Modern Love." Is it a story of a love which is dead? Or, is it a high tragedy of man struggling against inevitable defeat? Or, is it purely autobiographical? Or, is it something different from any of these?

G. M. Trevelyan says that it is the story of "a man and wife who loved each other once, but have ceased to love."³ Yet, Madam repeatedly seeks a reconciliation; and the husband feels a strong attraction to her, to the end of the tale, although he struggles against it. The couple are estranged, but they have not ceased to love.

Nor does the poem seem to be, as May Henderson suggests, a tragedy dealing with "the conflicting majesty and futility of human endeavour."⁴ The poem is concerned mainly with unfaithfulness, petty jealousy, and retaliation, and these are certainly not majestic subjects. Neither is the ending inevitable. There is not a futile struggle against defeat; there is rather a failure to struggle against something which could be overcome.

The story almost surely has autobiographical roots, but I believe that treating it as purely autobiographical,

³ George Macaulay Trevelyan, The Poetry and Philosophy of George Meredith. (London, 1916) p. 20.

⁴ M. S. Henderson, George Meredith, Novelist, Poet, Reformer. (London, 1908) p. 73.

as Robert Sencourt does,⁵ will lead to an incomplete or inaccurate interpretation, just as the other two treatments will.

The views of these three critics are representative of most of the critical evaluations of the poem. However, I feel that "Modern Love" is something far different from what they see; that it is a typically Meredithian Comic treatment of a social conflict.

To explicate this interpretation, it is necessary first to examine briefly Meredith's fundamental ideas on man and society, from which his idea of the Comic Spirit springs.

The two primary elements in these ideas are Earth, or nature, and man. From his earliest writing, Meredith emphasizes the importance of man's joining with and understanding nature.

And who that hears her now and yields
His being to her searching tones,
And seats his soul upon her wings,
. . . . will gather in the flight
More knowledge of her secret, more
Delight in her beneficence
Than hours of musing, or the lore
That lives with men could ever bring.⁶

Here, Earth is the great mother and man is her son. However

⁵ Robert Esmande Sencourt, The Life of George Meredith. (New York, 1929) p. 55 passim.

⁶ George Meredith, The Poetical Works of George Meredith. (New York, 1912), "South-West Wind in the Woodland," p. 26.

in almost all of the work after this early collection,⁷ there is much more than just a parent-child relationship. Man springs from Earth, but "Earth was not Earth before her sons appeared. . . ."⁸ Man is both created by Earth and a power in the creation of Earth. "She in her children is growing."⁹

Man should recognize that this nature is "his well of strength, his home of rest. . . ."¹⁰ He is wrong to look for some power beyond nature.

. . . . to be rightly materialistic--to understand and take nature as she is--is to get on the true divine high-road.¹¹

But when "to the Invisible he raves. . . ."¹² Earth, although she hears him, cannot help him. She has given him life and his home of rest, but "More aid than that embrace. . . .she cannot give:. . . ."¹³ She is most beneficent in her desires

⁷ Poems, 1851. He continued to publish poetry until his death in 1909. These later volumes were: Modern Love and Poems of the English Roadside, 1862; Poems and Lyrics of the Joy of the Earth, 1883; Ballads and Poems of Tragic Life, 1887; A Reading of Earth, 1888; Poems, 1892; Odes in Contribution to the Song of French History, 1898; A Reading of Life, 1901; and Last Poems, posthumous, 1910.

⁸ Meredith, Poetical Works, "Appreciation," p. 185.

⁹ Ibid., "Ode to the Spirit of Earth in Autumn," p. 177.

¹⁰ Ibid., "Earth and Man," p. 240.

¹¹ Meredith, Letters, p. 136.

¹² Meredith, Poetical Works, "Earth and Man," p. 241.

¹³ Ibid., p. 240.

for man, for

Those are her rules that bid him wash foul sin

And her desires are those

For happiness, for lastingness, for light.¹⁴

But as long as man has "The greed to touch, to view, to have, to live: . . ."¹⁵ he fails to see this beneficence. Only through "mind seeking Mind"¹⁶ can he find "The great Over-Reason we / Name Beneficence: . . ."¹⁷

The mind must be the guiding force in man's actions. He has in him two other forces, the blood and the spirit, but all three must "Join for true felicity,"¹⁸ and work in fine harmony at the direction of the brain. The blood, or sensation, "is a precious gift,"¹⁹ but must not usurp the station of the mind. Nor should the spirit, or emotion, excess of which leads to sentimentalism, rise out of its proper subordinate position. The supremacy of either the senses or sentiment over mind leads to the exalting of "our old worm Self. . . ."²⁰ When Self is supreme, man is an anti-social being, striving only for the satisfaction of his own

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 244.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 242.

¹⁶ Ibid., "A Faith on Trial," p. 360.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid., "The Woods of Westermain," p. 202.

¹⁹ Ibid., "The Question Whither," p. 339.

²⁰ Ibid., "A Faith on Trial," p. 356.

emotions and senses; he does not rise above the level of the beasts.

Man can become "a spirit nigh divine"²¹ when Reason wrestles with Self and attains a victory. Then, the ". . . . proud letter I / Drops prone and void as any thoughtless dash,"²² and man is free of the taint of personality. Only when this freedom from Self and ascendancy of mind is achieved, can man take his proper place in nature, for it is "Mind that with deep Earth unites,. . . ." ²³ And man's mind will be ruled by a great social consciousness. When Self is put down, men will unite in a great brotherhood, in which all social relations, including marriage, will be sound and complete.

To summarize these points briefly, man is a part of a benevolent and beneficent Earth. Earth wants man to have happiness, but he must achieve it through his own struggle. For his struggle to succeed, his mind must control and direct his senses and his spirit. When his mind is supreme, man will recognize that Earth has destined him for a position nigh divine in a great society and, through the exercise of his mind, he will be able to realize this destiny.

²¹ Ibid., "Earth and Man," p. 245.

²² Ibid., "The State of Age," p. 186.

²³ Ibid., "The Woods of Westermain," p. 203.

For Meredith, the chief guide in this struggle is the Comic Spirit. The relation of the Comic Spirit to society presents a paradox similar to that in the relation between man and Earth; the Comic Spirit is a creation of society, but it has the power to raise that society to a higher level.

The Comic "is the perceptive, is the governing spirit,"²⁴ which gives aim to the power of laughter, the "reviver of sick Earth."²⁵

The laughter of Comedy is impersonal and of unrivalled politeness, nearer a smile. It laughs through the mind, for the mind directs it;²⁶

This Comic laugh can teach man what ails him by pointing out that he is deviating from nature when he is influenced by his own "private interests and speculative obfuscations."²⁷ The Comic Spirit is "the first-born of common sense,"²⁸ and is activated by any of man's deviations.

Men's future upon Earth does not attract it; their honesty and shapeliness in the present does; and whenever they wax out of proportion, overblown, affected, pretentious, bombastical, hypocritical, pedantic, fantastically delicate; whenever it sees them self-deceived or hoodwinked, given to run

²⁴ George Meredith, An Essay on Comedy (New York, 1909) p. 74.

²⁵ Meredith, Poetical Works, "The Appeasement of Demeter," p. 335.

²⁶ Meredith, Essay on Comedy, p. 82.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 62.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 56.

riot in idolatries, drifting into vanities, congregating in absurdities, planning short-sightedly, plotting dementedly; whenever they are at variance with their professions, and violate the unwritten but perceptible laws binding them in consideration one to another; whenever they offend sound reason, fair justice; are false with humility or mined with conceit, individually, or in the bulk--the Spirit overhead will look humanely malign and cast an oblique light on them, followed by volleys of silvery laughter. That is the Comic Spirit.²⁹

All of these deviations are foolish, and Folly is "perpetually sliding into new shapes in a society possessed of wealth and leisure," ³⁰ Folly is "the daughter of Unreason and Sentimentalism" ³¹ and can be conquered only by the Comic. Even common sense, alone, cannot defeat Folly, for, although the Comic Spirit is "the first-born of common sense," it is something more, in a higher realm of consciousness, and may be dormant or even absent in common sense. When common sense views Folly with contempt, disdain, or anger, the Comic is not active, for these attitudes are, in themselves, aspects of Folly to the Comic perception.

The Comic, through pointing out that deviations from nature are forms of Folly, will help man to attain a complete social consciousness. When a man has turned from nature by following the dictates of Self, springing either from the senses or the emotions, the Comic laugh can bring him back

²⁹ Ibid., pp. 83-4.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 56.

³¹ Ibid., p. 57.

again. If he is in a Comic situation, he needs only to perceive that it is Comic to have his deviation corrected.

The position which women hold in society is very important in Meredith's ideas on the Comic Spirit. Although, he says, there can be society without the Comic Spirit, a high civilization can exist only where there is Comedy, and "that comes of some degree of equality of the sexes."³²

. . . . where women are on the road to an equal footing with men, in attainments and in liberty--in what they have won for themselves, and what has been granted by a fair civilization--there pure Comedy flourishes,. . . .³³

A society, then, which has some social equality between the sexes, and in which common sense flourishes, will be able to rise to great heights, through the corrective guidance of the Comic Spirit, which can exist only in such a society. And in this society, the Comic Spirit can be especially valuable in resolving the quarrels and estrangements of people in love--as the couple in "Modern Love" are.

You may estimate your capacity for Comic perception by being able to detect the ridicule of them you love, without loving them less: and more by being able to see yourself somewhat ridiculous in dear eyes, and accepting the correction their image of you proposes.

Each one of an affectionate couple may be willing, as the saying goes, to die for the other, yet unwilling to utter the agreeable word at the right moment; but if the wits were sufficiently quick for them to perceive that they are in a Comic situation, as

³² Ibid., p. 54.

³³ Ibid., p. 55.

affectionate couples must be when they quarrel,
they would not wait for the moon or the almanac,
. . . . to bring back the flood-tide of tender
feelings, that they should join hands and lips.³⁴

But, if the Comic Spirit is absent or inactive, if
a Comic situation is not seen and corrected, by thoughtful
laughter, tragedy may spring from the Comic situation. One
of the clearest examples in Meredith's work of tragedy
stemming from a Comic situation can be found in The Tragic
Comedians. In this novel, a Dr. Alvan sends his fiancée,
Clothilde, back to her parents, who object to his desire to
marry her. Later, he muses on his action.

. . . .he heard the world acclaiming him;--
'Alvan's wife was honourably won, as became
the wife of a Doctor of Law, from the bosom of
her family, when he could have had her in the
old lawless fashion, for the call of a coachman!
Alvan, the republican, is eminently a citizen.
Consider his past life by that test of his
character.'³⁵

Here, Alvan's actions are directed by the desire to have his
own reputation bettered. He is being guided by Self; his
action is essentially Comic. Yet this action, which he does
not recognize as foolish, is the cause of his downfall and
death. His later actions are based on this Self motive, and
soon have been carried so far that he cannot save himself.
Thus can tragedy stem from unrecognized Comic situations.
And, thus it does in "Modern Love."

³⁴ Ibid., pp. 72-73.

³⁵ Meredith, Works, Vol. XV: The Tragic Comedians, p. 106.

CHAPTER II

THE HUSBAND IN "MODERN LOVE"

AS A COMIC CHARACTER

Meredith's ideal of marriage is probably well illustrated in the novel Lord Ormont and his Aminta. Here, the elopement of Aminta and Matthew Weyburn is strongly sanctioned, despite its being against the main stream of Victorian morality, because they have both a strong emotional love and a strong intellectual tie, with common aims and ideas. They accept each other as intellectual equals.

The marriage in "Modern Love" is far from this ideal. It is founded on emotion. The poem is, Meredith says, "a dissection of the sentimental passion of these days."¹ It is, however, just a dissection, not an interpretation, and the reader must find for himself Meredith's evaluation of the various facets presented. Still, Meredith does give some guide to the interpretation, in the objective, clear-sighted commentary of the poet's portions of the poem. With this guide, and with an understanding of Meredith's idea of the Comic Spirit, we can, I think, see the husband not as tragic,

¹ Meredith, Letters, p. 156.

but as Comic; and the forces which bring about the tragic end will stand out not as superhuman and unescapable, but as weakly human, and correctable.

The first two sonnets, by the poet, set the scene of conflict between the husband and Madam.

Like sculptured effigies they might be seen
Upon their marriage tomb, the sword between;
Each wishing for the sword that severs all.²
Each sucked a secret, and each wore a mask.³

They had become stone-like, physically and mentally; neither would relax the hard cover of bitterness formed in their struggle. She had another companion, and he knew of the man. His reactions were mixed and confused:

. . . . if their smiles encountered, he went mad,
. . . . and then again
He fainted on his vengefulness, and strove
To ape the magnanimity of love,
And smote himself, a shuddering heap of pain.⁴

Here the poet describes the husband's contradictory emotional reactions. He hates Madam, but he still feels drawn to her. He turns to other activities to find happiness, but he is so enmeshed in his feelings about Madam that other joys have "suffered shipwreck with the ship,"⁵ and can give only a momentary illusion of happiness.

² Meredith, Poetical Works, "Modern Love" I, p. 133.

³ Ibid., II, p. 134.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid., IV, p. 134.

Almost as soon as his own narration opens, he begins to expose his emotionalism.

The love is here; it has but changed its aim.
O bitter barren woman! What's the name?
The name, the name, the new name thou hast won?
Behold me striking the world's coward stroke!
That I will not do, though the sting is dire.⁶

He feels that he would be justified to brand her as unfaithful, but he will not, because he sees himself as too fine and noble and chivalrous to do such a thing. And he seems to enjoy thinking this of himself. This great pride, this manifestation of Self--emotional rather than intellectual--is the most obvious trait of the husband throughout the monologue.

My tears are on thee, that have rarely dropped
As balm for any bitter wound of mine:
My breast will open to thee at a sign!⁷

He is almost able to sublimate this pride, to make of it a compassion for that which he hates, but the sublimation is not completely successful. It is Madam who must make the sign.

His emotions are still in turmoil, with hate battling love.

. . . 'twas dusk; she in his grasp; none near.
. . . from her eyes, as from a poison cup,
He drank until the fluttering eyelids screened.
Devilish malignant witch! and oh, young beam
Of heaven's circle-glory! Here thy shape
To squeeze like an intoxicating grape--
I might, and yet thou goest safe, supreme.⁸

⁶ Ibid., VI, p. 136.

⁷ Ibid., VIII, p. 136.

⁸ Ibid., IX, p. 137.

But soon his anger overpowers his love. He gives a warning:
"Prepare,/ You lovers, to know Love a thing of moods."⁹

Madam has killed their love and destroyed their future, but even worse, she has made their past happiness questionable.

Methinks with all this loss I were content,
If the mad Past, on which my foot is based,
Were firm, or might be blotted: but the whole
Of life is mixed: the mocking Past will stay:
And if I drink oblivion of a day,
So shorten I the stature of my soul.¹⁰

He fears, and almost makes himself believe, that in his early happiness, Madam was untrue. He makes no attempt not to believe it, for it would help to justify his self-righteousness.

He almost enjoys the sense of being wronged; he sees his pain and forbearance as noble.

What soul would bargain for a cure that brings
Contempt the nobler agony to kill?
Rather let me bear on the bitter ill,
And strike this rusty bosom with new stings!¹¹

My Lady had appeared, and he had thought of a flirtation with her to cure his unhappiness, but had rejected it to immolate himself on the pyre of his marriage. Madam had shown jealousy of My Lady, and he realizes that " 'Women still may love whom they deceive.' "¹² However, a reunion with

⁹ Ibid., X, p. 137.

¹⁰ Ibid., XII, p. 138.

¹¹ Ibid., XIV, p. 139.

¹² Ibid.

Madam on such a basis is not to his mind. He must have all.

He has found a "wanton-scented tress," a reminder of a past love of his own, and he knows that he must ask charity for this. Yet, even when he realizes that part of the blame for their conflict must fall on him, his pride is so great that he can commend himself as being honest and noble in admitting his wrong.

I am not of those miserable males
Who sniff at vice and, daring not to snap,
Do therefore hope for heaven. I take the hap
Of all my deeds. The wind that fills my sails
Propels; but I am helmsman. . . .¹³

But he is able to forget very quickly any of his own faults and need for forgiveness. When Madam tries to speak of their conflict, he feels that she wants to confess something of her actions. She is afraid and irresolute; she does not know how to begin. "She will not speak. I will not ask."¹⁴ He has dismissed completely the memory of that "wanton-scented tress," and again put the whole responsibility for the conflict on her.

Although it has been nearly a year since he began to hate Madam, he knows that she has never been physically unfaithful to him, that her only crime has been "faithlessness of heart," but

The misery is greater, as I live!
To know her flesh so pure, so keen her sense,

¹³ Ibid., XX, p. 142.

¹⁴ Ibid., XIII, p. 143.

That she does penance now for no offence,
Save against Love. The less can I forgive!¹⁵

The less can he forgive her, that she cannot find happiness with him, that the privilege of being his wife is not a great enough thing for her, that she seeks companionship with someone else.

Through the first half of the poem, he has been almost passive, content only to muse on the wrongs which he feels have been done to him. But now he begins to try to revenge himself on Madam. He taunts her with his knowledge of her actions. She has been reading a French novel which she says is unnatural. He rehearses the plot to her: there is the usual triangle of husband, wife and lover. But of course, he says ironically, such things cannot happen here. The husband in the novel knows of his wife's unfaithfulness, but will forgive her if she will choose between him and the lover.

. . . . She does choose;
And takes her husband, like any proper wife.
Unnatural? My dear, these things are life:
And life, some think, is worthy of the muse.¹⁶

He decides that Madam must be repaid in kind for killing their love. A serpent grows in the place of love, and, ". . . . you that made Love bleed,/ You must bear all the venom of his tooth."¹⁷ His doctor has prescribed

¹⁵ Ibid., XXIV, p. 143.

¹⁶ Ibid., XXV, p. 144.

¹⁷ Ibid., XXVI, p. 145.

distractions to take his mind from his worries, and he starts a flirtation with My Lady. He does it coldly, not as an attempt to find a new love, but purely for the comfort which it will give to his Self.

I must be flattered. The imperious
Desire speaks out. Lady, I am content
To play with you this game of Sentiment,
And with you enter on paths perilous;
But if across your beauty I throw light,
To make it threefold, it must be all mine.
First secret; then avowed. For I must shine
Envied,--I, lessened in my proper sight!
Be watchful of your beauty, Lady dear!
How much hangs on that lamp you cannot tell.
Most earnestly I pray you, tend it well:
And men shall see me as a burning sphere;
And men shall mark you eyeing me, and groan
To be the God of such a grand sunflower!
I feel the promptings of Satanic power,
While you do homage unto me alone.¹⁸

This sonnet is the fullest expression in the poem of the husband's attitudes. The "proud letter I" sounds loudly throughout. The whole stanza is a cry of Self. He is quite open in his statement of the reasons for his action. "I must be flattered." There is no thought of a reciprocal love, or even esteem, growing up in the flirtation. He is content with a "game of Sentiment," simply superficial feelings. The game may be dangerous--he has come to distrust all emotional relations because of his difficulty with Madam--but if it will flatter him, he will risk the danger.

He feels that he has great power to engender love in

¹⁸ Ibid., XXVIII, p. 145.

a woman. If this happens to My Lady, if her love should show, and enhance her beauty, the credit must fall on him; she must shine for him alone. His faith in himself has been weakened by Madam's turning from him, and by having My Lady's feeling for him known, and envied, this faith can be restored. My Lady's beauty is the center of his thoughts. His position hangs on this; through being attended by her, he can hold the envy and admiration of others. He feels a firm power, an ability to control and command all which he desires, so long as he is the sole focus of this great beauty.

Suddenly he realizes that things are not as he had planned them. My Lady is beautiful, but it is a natural beauty, owing no debt to him. He begins to question. "Is my soul beggared?"¹⁹ He feels that he wants something higher than the flirtation which he has started, but My Lady is content with a flirtation, and he senses that he has lost the power to make a woman love him.

Where is that ancient wealth wherewith I clothed
Our human nakedness, and could endow
With spiritual splendour a white brow
That else had grinned at me the fact I loathed?²⁰

The loss of this power may result in his affording amusement because of Madam's turning from him. Just as he must be flattered, he must not be laughed at.

¹⁹ Ibid., XXIX, p. 146.

²⁰ Ibid.

But since he cannot rouse in My Lady this higher love, he rationalizes his position. After all, he says, nature has decreed that we must suffer, and that young Love shall be fleeting; the wise are "the few who live but with the day."²¹ He convinces himself that a mortal love is desirable.

Again Madam comes to him, as she did when My Lady first roused her jealousy. After a fencing conversation, she wishes him well in his happiness with My Lady, although she says she has no happiness. And he rebuffs her; he advises:

. . . . 'Take ship!
For happiness is somewhere to be had.'
'Nowhere for me!' Her voice is barely heard.
I am not melted, and make no pretence
With commonplace I freeze her,. . . .²²

Even as he spurns her, he reaches out for something which will reflect credit to him. "It is no vulgar nature I have wived."²³ He has turned from her, but he still finds cause for pride in her fine sensitivity; she is a lovely delicate person, and she has been his.

Having turned away from Madam once more, he still has the problem of My Lady before him. He has said that she has common sense, and he begins to fear that she will reject his emotional needs. The fear seems justified when she counsels

²¹ Ibid., XXX, p. 146.

²² Ibid., XXXIV, p. 148.

²³ Ibid., XXXIV, p. 148.

him to return to Madam, and he tells her his feelings.

You know me that I never can renew
The bond that woman broke: what would you have?
'Tis Love or Vileness! not a choice between,
Save petrification! What does pity here?
She killed a thing, and now it's dead, 'tis dear.²⁴

He can never return to Madam because she has wronged him.

Still, he must be loved, and he pleads with My Lady. She must give him a pure love, or he will find a vile one. Only from pity, not from love, could he return to Madam, and, as she killed their love, she deserves no pity.

My Lady accepts his plea, but almost as soon as he gains this love which he thought would give him happiness, he finds that it will not. He sees Madam with the man, and is instantly jealous. His pride will not admit that she, who once loved him, could love another. But his very jealousy leads him to a reunion with Madam.

The reunion is short. He won her back from the man, and was satisfied with this for a little time, but this would not feed his pride for long. The jealousy subsides when its target is removed, and he once again feels that it could be only pity, not love, which holds him to her. Madam, feeling the pity, turns away again. He is sorry for her, but his pride is still dominant.

Poor soul! if, in those early days unkind,
Thy power to sting had been but power to grieve,

24 Ibid., XXXVIII, p. 150.

We now might with an equal spirit meet,
And not be matched like innocence and vice.²⁵

Even now, he sees himself as completely blameless; all the vice is Madam's. If she had only been the great forbearing spirit which he is, he says, they might have found a way around their early troubles and might be happy now.

Although he finds her with the man, they do gain some small bit of happiness when he declares his firm belief in her. This brief joy is ended when Madam, in the mistaken belief that he loves My Lady, leaves. And his comment on Madam's action, at the very end of his monologue, shows him still completely controlled by Self.

Their sense is with their senses all mixed in,
Destroyed by subtleties these women are!²⁶

It is still "these women." He cannot admit that he might be acting wrongly. Much of his old feeling for her has returned; he has some admiration for her motive for leaving him; he wants her to return. But even after he finds her again, in her hope and doubt and fear, he will not tell her these things. And it is because he does not tell her, because she cannot be sure of his feelings, that she kills herself.

Thus, it is not a tragic flaw, but a Comic fault which leads to this end. This is not a man who, as Constantin

²⁵ Ibid., XLIV, p. 152.

²⁶ Ibid., XLVIII, p. 154.

Photiades suggests, "stoically swallows his grief,"²⁷ but rather one who is too proud and self-centered to admit any weakness in himself. He can see what the fault is, but he cannot see whose the fault is.

While it is the husband's pride which leads directly to the tragic end, pride is not the only Comic trait which Meredith presents in "Modern Love." Sentimentality, which is one of the most common targets of his criticism, is also important in the poem.

Madam's sentimentality and unrealistic attitude toward life is adumbrated early in the poem, by the husband.

Oh, had I with my darling helped to mince
The facts of life, you still had seen me go
With hindward feather and with forward toe
Her much-adored delightful Fairy Prince!²⁸

This also shows another aspect of his pride. He sees himself as far too sensible to be guilty of such foolishness. Yet, he shows soon that he over-values emotion.

'I play for Seasons; not Eternities!'
Says Nature,. . . .
. . . . Upon her dying rose
She drops a look of fondness, and goes by,
.
This lesson of our only visible friend
Can we not teach our foolish hearts to learn?
Yes! yes!--but, oh, our human rose is fair
Surpassingly! Lose calmly Love's great bliss,
When the renewed forever of a kiss
Whirls life within the shower of loosened hair.²⁹

²⁷ Constantin Photiades, George Meredith, His Life, Genius, and Teachings. (London, 1913) p. 236.

²⁸ "Modern Love" X, p. 137.

²⁹ Ibid., XIII, pp. 138-139.

He turns to nature for guidance, but dismisses as impossible her admonition to lose this bliss calmly, when the rose of love, the purely emotional and sensual love, is so fair.

His flirtation with My Lady brings out his sentimentality more strongly.

She yields: my Lady in her noblest mood
Has yielded: she, my golden-crownèd rose!
The bride of every sense! more sweet than those
Who breathe the violet breath of maidenhood.³⁰

She is indeed the bride of his every sense, of his feelings, but not of his mind. He started the flirtation because of his pride; he continued it because of his pride, because he wanted to be the object of a love. He succeeds, and he rejoices in his feelings.

The feelings are exalted to a more fantastic level after he returns to Madam.

It is the season of the sweet wild rose,
My Lady's emblem in the heart of me!
So golden-crownèd shines she gloriously,
And with that softest dream of blood she glows:
Mild as an evening heaven round Hesper bright!
I pluck the flower, and smell it, and revive
The time when in her eyes I stood alive.³¹

This is highly affected; he expands his feelings for My Lady far beyond any value they actually had, and glories in the excess of them.

This sentimentality of the husband is very closely allied to his pride. He has a great Self, and he must

³⁰ Ibid., XXXIX, p. 150.

³¹ Ibid., XLV, p. 153.

satisfy all of its demands. He must be loved; he must be admired; he must be envied. He must never be ridiculed--that would weaken his estimate of himself. His jealousy springs partly from this; Madam's turning to another might cause him to be laughed at. He sees himself as exceedingly kind, compassionate, noble, and far above the average in sensitivity. And because of this, his feeling and emotions must be finer, more delicate, more intense than the average. His sentiments must be greater than those of others, in order to fit into his character as he sees it.

These are the things which make Comedy, not tragedy.

The Comic Spirit turns its attention to men

. . . . whenever they wax out of proportion,
overblown, affected,. . . . fantastically
delicate; whenever it sees them self-deceived
. . . .drifting into vanities,. . . .whenever
they. . . .violate the unwritten but perceptible
laws binding them in consideration one to
another; whenever they offend. . . .fair justice;
[or] are. . . .mired with conceit,. . . .³²

These basically anti-social attitudes appear whenever the brain is not exercising its proper control over men. And these actions, targets of the Comic Spirit set forth in the Essay on Comedy, might almost be drawn from the character of the husband in "Modern Love."

32 Meredith, Essay on Comedy, pp. 83-84.

CHAPTER III

THE HUSBAND'S FAILURE

TO SEE THE COMIC

If the points made in the preceding chapter are valid, then the husband in "Modern Love" is a Comic character, as Meredith defines the term. And--as in the already mentioned The Tragic Comedians and in The Ordeal of Richard Feverel, where the essentially Comic "system" of Sir Austin Feverel is a basic cause for tragedy--the Comic actions of the husband are mainly responsible for the tragic end. However, the husband could have avoided this end if he had been able to recognize his actions as Comic.

The comment of the poet on the situations in "Modern Love," in one of the early sonnets of the poem, bears directly on a failure to recognize the Comic.

Cold as a mountain in its star-pitched tent,
Stood high Philosophy, less friend than foe:
Whom self-caged passion, from its prison bars,
Is always watching with a wondering hate.

Oh, wisdom never comes when it is gold,
And the great price we pay for it full worth:¹

Meredith often uses "Philosophy" as a synonym for "brain,"

¹ Meredith, Poetical Works, "Modern Love," IV, p. 135.

the intellectual power, and seems to do so here. The intelligence stands above purely emotional conflicts. And passion, the feelings, which is good and desirable when it is directed by the intellect and turned outward to help in understanding other people and achieving a social consciousness--when it turns inward, is contained in and centered on Self, will only hate and fear the intellect, which would guide it away from the egocentrism it enjoys.

The last two lines are especially significant.

Oh, wisdom never comes when it is gold,
And the great price we pay for it full worth:

Man drifts along in Folly when he needs most to be thinking, and he pays heavily for the wisdom he gains through the experience of tragedy brought on by the Folly. And thus it is with the husband; he acts unwisely and he does pay heavily.

Although his actions are mainly motivated by pride, he does show occasionally that he can objectify, at least partially, his problems. But he demonstrates repeatedly that he is unable to maintain an intellectual detachment long enough to achieve any permanent correction of his actions. At the times when this detachment is most important, he falls back into the control of his pride.

He realizes that Madam has not purposely brought about their estrangement and that she has not wanted it.

Yet it was plain she struggled, and that salt
Of righteous feeling made her pitiful.

Where came the cleft between us? whose the fault?²

He is not placing all the blame on Madam, but rather trying to discover the real reason for the cleft. But almost immediately he says, "My breast will open for thee at a sign!"³ His pride refuses to allow any lasting thought of his being responsible.

He recognizes the completely emotional basis of their marriage when he refers to Madam's "Fairy Prince" attitude, but he does not see that he too must have acquiesced in this. For him, it is only she who wanted to "mince the facts of life." He can see the basic problem, but not his responsibility in it. Even when he discovers the "wanton-scented tress," he feels himself superior to Madam merely by admitting that he needs forgiveness.

Occasionally he does admit his own emotionally guided actions. Once, at a houseparty where they were to have a small room, he slept on the floor rather than share the one bed with Madam, and he senses the hurt he has given her. "Come, Shame, burn to my soul!"⁴ But as he sees her coming to sleep beside him as a penance for her offence against love, and an attempt to use her womanhood to win him

² Ibid., VIII, p. 136.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid., XXIII, p. 143.

back, he dismisses his feeling of shame and rejects her.

The reasons for the flirtation with My Lady are stated openly: he must be flattered and envied. But rather than seeing this need for flattery as a fault, he accepts it as natural. He says that My Lady has common sense in addition to her beauty, and he recognizes this combination as desirable. He believes that in a union with My Lady, who has the common sense which he feels Madam lacks, he would be matched. But even as he expresses this belief, he reveals in himself a lack of this common sense which he admires.

One restless corner of my heart or head,
That holds a dying something never dead,
Still frets, though Nature giveth all she can.
It means, that woman is not, I opine,
Her sex's antidote. Who seeks the asp
For serpents' bites?⁵

He still distrusts all women because he feels that he has been wronged by one. And his jealousy and hatred of Madam are still present and strong enough to over-ride his brain. If My Lady does have common sense, he cannot match it.

When his jealousy of Madam is expressed openly again, he recognizes it as such, and realizes that he cannot love My Lady while jealous of Madam.

. . . . Can I love one,
And yet be jealous of the other? None
Commits such folly. Terrible Love, I ween,
Has might, even dead, half sighing to upheave
The lightless seas of selfishness amain:⁶

⁵ Ibid., XXXII, p. 147.

⁶ Ibid., XL, pp. 150-151.

He realizes the selfishness of his jealousy, but cannot hold this realization. He smarts at the memory of Madam's earlier action, and tries to keep from returning to her. But,

How many a thing which we cast to the ground,
When others pick it up becomes a gem!

And by reflected light its worth is found.⁷

Yet as soon as Madam accepts him again, "that zeal of false appreciation quickly fades."⁸ It may truly have been false; it was based on jealousy. But the detachment which he had achieved is lost as soon as he regains his position, and he returns to his earlier feeling of dislike for Madam. He will not love her, but he will pity her because she has killed her chance of the great happiness of being loved by him.

Almost at the end of the tragedy he sees the need for intellectual control of man's actions.

More brain, O Lord, more brain! or we shall mar
Utterly this fair garden we might win.⁹

But here, as in all of the other mind-ordered parts of his narration, he does not go far enough. He feels that it is only Madam who mars the fair garden. This is his view of Madam's final act of breaking away and trying to give him happiness even if she cannot have it. He sees the act as nobly motivated, but foolish. He does recognize the foolishness,

⁷ Ibid., XLI, p. 151.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid., XLVIII, p. 154.

and does realize that he feels some of his old love for her, but he despises the foolishness and refuses to tell her of his feelings. His contempt and anger subvert any possibility of correction coming from his recognition of the need for "more brain," for,

Contempt is a sentiment that cannot be entertained by comic intelligence. What is it but an excuse to be idly minded, or personally lofty, or comfortably narrow, not perfectly humane? If we do not feign when we say that we despise Folly, we shut the brain. There is a disdainful attitude in the presence of Folly, partaking of the foolishness to Comic perception; and anger is not much less foolish than disdain.¹⁰

¹⁰ Meredith, Essay on Comedy, p. 57.

CONCLUSION

In this paper I have tried to show that the tragic end in "Modern Love" is caused mainly by the Folly of the husband, not by some super-mundane force or tragic flaw, as most critics have held.

I have pointed out that in Meredith's beliefs, the intellect--"Philosophy," "brain," "mind"--must control the rest of man--his Self--if he is to live in true happiness in society. The Comic Spirit is an objective attitude which can correct man's actions--bring him back under the guidance of his intellect--by pointing out Folly, which springs from Self.

The actions of the husband in the poem are motivated by Self--pride and sentimentality--and are foolish. The final results of his actions are not, however, inevitable. The actions could have been corrected by an intellectual, Comic, perception. Because the husband was unable to see his actions as Comic, they ended tragically.

"Modern Love," then, is a presentation of the idea that man is headed for tragedy if his Comic actions go unperceived and therefore uncorrected.

APPENDIX

MODERN LOVE

I¹

By this he knew she wept with waking eyes:
That, at his hand's light quiver by her head,
The strange low sobs that shook their common bed
Were called into her with a sharp surprise,
And strangled mute, like little gaping snakes,
Dreadfully venomous to him. She lay
Stone-still, and the long darkness flowed away
With muffled pulses. Then, as midnight makes
Her giant heart of Memory and Tears
Drink the pale drug of silence, and so beat
Sleep's heavy measure, they from head to feet
Were moveless, looking through their dead black years.
By vain regret scrawled over the blank wall.
Like sculptured effigies they might be seen
Upon their marriage-tomb, the sword between;
Each wishing for the sword that severs all.

II

It ended, and the morrow brought the task.
Her eyes were guilty gates, that let him in
By shutting all too zealous for their sin:
Each sucked a secret, and each wore a mask.
But, oh, the bitter taste her beauty had!
He sickened as at breath of poison-flowers:
A languid humour stole among the hours,
And if their smiles encountered, he went mad,
And raged deep inward, till the light was brown
Before his vision, and the world, forgot,
Looked wicked as some old dull murder-spot.
A star with lurid beams, she seemed to crown
The pit of infamy: and then again
He fainted on his vengefulness, and strove
To ape the magnanimity of love,
And smote himself, a shuddering heap of pain.

¹ The bracketed lines are those of the poet as observer.

III This was the woman; what now of the man?
But pass him. If he comes beneath a heel,
He shall be crushed until he cannot feel,
Or, being callous, haply till he can.
But he is nothing:--nothing? Only mark
The rich light striking out from her on him!
Ha! what a sense it is when her eyes swim
Across the man she singles, leaving dark
All else! Lord God, who mad'st the thing so fair,
See that I am drawn to her even now!
It cannot be such harm on her cool brow
To put a kiss? Yet is I meet him there!
But she is mine! Ah, no! I know too well
I claim a star whose light is overcast:
I claim a phantom-woman of the past.
The hour has struck, though I heard not the bell!

IV All other joys of life he strove to warm,
And magnify, and catch them to his lip;
But they had suffered shipwreck with the ship,
And gazed upon him sallow from the storm.
Or if Delusion came, 'twas but to show
The coming minute mock the one that went.
Cold as a mountain in its star-pitched tent,
Stood high Philosophy, less friend than foe:
Whom self-caged Passion, from its prison-bars,
Is always watching with a wondering hate.
Not till the fire is dying in the grate,
Look we for any kinship with the stars.
Oh, wisdom never comes when it is gold,
And the great price we pay for it full worth:
We have it only when we are half earth.
Little avails that coinage to the old!

V A message from her set his brain aflame.
A world of household matters filled her mind,
Wherein he saw hypocrisy designed:
She treated him as something that is tame,
And but at other provocation bites.
Familiar was her shoulder in the glass,
Through that dark rain: yet it may come to pass
That a changed eye finds such familiar sights
More keenly tempting than new loveliness.
The 'What has been' a moment seemed his own:
The splendours, mysteries, dearer because known,
Nor less divine: Love's inmost sacredness
Called to him, 'Come! '--In his restraining start,
Eyes nurtured to be looked at scarce could see
A wave of the great waves of Destiny
Convulsed at a checked impulse of the heart.

VI

It chanced his lips did meet her forehead cool.
She had no blush, but slanted down her eye.
Shamed nature, then, confesses love can die:
And most she punishes the tender fool
Who will believe what honours her most!
Dead! is it dead? She has a pulse, and flow
Of tears, the price of blood-drops, as I know,
For whom the midnight sobs around Love's ghost,
Since then I heard her, and so will sob on.
The love is here; it has but changed its aim.
O bitter barren woman! what's the name?
The name, the name, the new name thou hast won?
Behold me striking the world's coward stroke!
That will I not do, though the sting is dire.
--Beneath the surface this, while by the fire
They sat, she laughing at a quiet joke.

VII

She issues radiant from her dressing-room,
Like one prepared to scale an upper sphere:
--By stirring up a lower, much I fear!
How deftly that oiled barber lays his bloom!
That long-shanked dapper Cupid with frisked curls
Can make known women torturingly fair;
The gold-eyed serpent dwelling in rich hair
Awakes beneath his magic whisks and twirls.
His art can take the eyes from out my head,
Until I see with eyes of other men;
While deeper knowledge crouches in its den,
And sends a spark up:--is it true we are wed?
Yea! filthiness of body is most vile,
But faithlessness of heart I do hold worse.
The former, it were not so great a curse
To read on the steel-mirror of her smile.

VIII

Yet it was plain she struggled, and that salt
Of righteous feeling made her pitiful.
Poor twisting worm, so queenly beautiful!
Where came the cleft between us? Whose the fault?
My tears are on thee, that have rarely dropped
As balm for any bitter wound of mine:
My breast will open for thee at a sign!
But, no: we are two reed-pipes, coarsely stopped:
The God once filled them with his mellow breath;
And they were music till he flung them down,
Used! used! Hear now the discord-loving clown
Puff his gross spirit in them, worse than death!
I do not know myself without thee more:
In this unholy battle I grow base:
If the same soul be under the same face,
Speak, and a taste of that old time restore!

- IX He felt the wild beast in him betweenwhiles
So masterfully rude, that he would grieve
To see the helpless delicate thing receive
His guardianship through certain dark defiles.
Had he not teeth to rend, and hunger too?
But still he spared her. Once: 'Have you no fear?'
He said: 'twas dusk; she in his grasp: none near.
She laughed: 'No, surely; am I not with you?'
And uttering that soft starry 'you,' she leaned
Her gentle body near him, looking up;
And from her eyes, as from a poison-cup,
He drank until the fluttering eyelids screened.
Devilish malignant witch! and oh, young beam
Of heaven's circle-glory! Here thy shape
To squeeze like an intoxicating grape--
I might, and yet thou goest safe, supreme.
- X But where began the change; and what's my crime?
The wretch condemned, who has not been arraigned,
Chafes at his sentence. Shall I, unsustained,
Drag on Love's nerveless body thro' all time?
I must have slept, since now I wake. Prepare,
You lovers, to know Love a thing of moods:
Not, like hard life, of laws. In Love's deep woods,
I dreamt of loyal life:--the offence is there!
Love's jealous woods about the sun are curled;
At least, the sun far brighter there did beam.--
My crime is, that the puppet of a dream,
I plotted to be worthy of the world.
Oh, had I with my darling helped to mince
The facts of life, you still had seen me go
With hindward feather and with forward toe,
Her much-adored delightful Fairy Prince!
- XI Out in the yellow meadows, where the bee
Hums by us with the honey of the Spring,
And showers of sweet notes from the larks on wing
Are dropping like a noon-dew, wander we.
Or is it now? or was it then? for now,
As then, the larks from running rings pour showers:
The golden foot of May is on the flowers,
And friendly shadows dance upon her brow.
What's this, when Nature swears there is no change
To challenge eyesight? Now, as then, the grace
Of heaven seems holding earth in its embrace.
Nor eyes, nor heart, has she to feel it strange?
Look, woman, in the West. There will thou see
An amber cradle near the sun's decline:
Within it, featured even in death divine,
Is lying a dead infant, slain by thee.

- XII Not solely that the Future she destroys,
And the fair life which in the distance lies
For all men, beckoning out from dim rich skies:
Nor that the passing hour's supporting joys
Have lost the keen-edged flavour, which begat
Distinction in old times, and still should breed
Sweet Memory, and Hope,--earth's modest seed,
And heaven's high-prompting: not that the world is flat
Since that soft-luring creature I embraced
Among the children of Illusion went:
Methinks with all this loss I were content,
If the mad Past, on which my foot is based,
Were firm, or might be blotted: but the whole
Of life is mixed: the mocking Past will stay:
And if I drink oblivion of a day,
So shorten I the stature of my soul.
- XIII 'I play for Seasons; not Eternities!'
Says Nature, laughing on her way. 'So must
All those whose stake is nothing more than dust!'
And lo, she wins, and of her harmonies
She is full sure! Upon her dying rose
She drops a look of fondness, and goes by,
Scarce any retrospection in her eye;
For she the laws of growth most deeply knows,
Whose hands bear, here, a seed-bag--there, an urn.
Pledged she herself to aught, 'twould mark her end!
This lesson of our only visible friend
Can we not teach our foolish hearts to learn?
Yes! yes!--but, oh, our human rose is fair
Surpassingly! Lose calmly Love's great bliss,
When the renewed for ever of a kiss
Whirls life within the shower of loosened hair!
- XIV What soul would bargain for a cure that brings
Contempt the nobler agony to kill?
Rather let me bear on the bitter ill,
And strike this rusty bosom with new stings!
It seems there is another veering fit,
Since on a gold-haired lady's eyeballs pure
I looked with little prospect of a cure,
The while her mouth's red bow loosed shafts of wit.
Just heaven! can it be true that jealousy
Has decked the woman thus? and does her head
Swim somewhat for possessions forfeited?
Madam, you teach me many things that be.
I open an old book, and there I find
That 'Women still may love whom they deceive.'
Such love I prize not, madam: by your leave,
The game you play at is not to my mind.

- XV I think she sleeps: it must be sleep, when low
 Hangs that abandoned arm toward the floor;
 The face turned with it. Now make fast the door.
 Sleep on: it is your husband, not your foe.
 The Poet's black stage-lion of wronged love
 Frights not our modern dames:--well if he did!
 Now will I pour new light upon that lid,
 Full-sloping like the breasts beneath. *Sweet dove,
 Your sleep is pure. Nay, pardon: I disturb.
 I do not? good!' Her waking infant-stare
 Grows woman to the burden my hands bear:
 Her own handwriting to me when no curb
 Was left on Passion's tongue. She trembles through;
 A woman's tremble--the whole instrument:--
 I show another letter lately sent.
 The words are very like: the name is new.
- XVI In our old shipwrecked days there was an hour,
 When in the firelight steadily aglow,
 Joined slackly, we beheld the red chasm grow
 Among the clicking coals. Our library-bower
 That eve was left to us: and hushed we sat
 As lovers to whom Time is whispering.
 From sudden-opened doors we heard them sing:
 The nodding elders mixed good wine with chat.
 Well knew we that Life's greatest treasure lay
 With us, and of it was our talk. 'Ah, yes!
 Love dies!' I said: I never thought it less.
 She yearned to me that sentence to unsay.
 Then when the fire domed blackening, I found
 Her cheek was salt against my kiss, and swift
 Up the sharp scale of sobs her breast did lift:--
 Now am I haunted by that taste! that sound!
- XVII At dinner, she is hostess, I am host.
 Went the feast ever cheerfuller? She keeps
 The Topic over intellectual deeps
 In buoyancy afloat. They see no ghost.
 With sparkling surface-eyes we ply the ball:
 It is in truth a most contagious game:
 HIDING THE SKELETON, shall be its name.
 Such play as this the devils might appal!
 But here's the greater wonder; in that we,
 Enamoured of an acting nought can tire,
 Each other, like true hypocrites, admire;
 Warm-lighted looks, Love's ephemerioe,
 Shoot gaily o'er the dishes and the wine.
 We waken envy of our happy lot.
 Fast, sweet, and golden, shows the marriage-knot.
 Dear guests, you now have seen Love's corpse-light shine.

- XVIII Here Jack and Tom are paired with Moll and Meg.
Curved open to the river-reach is seen
A country merry-making on the green.
Fair space for signal shakings of the leg.
That little screwy fiddler from his booth,
Whence flows one nut-brown stream, commands the joints
Of all who caper here at various points.
I have known rustic revels in my youth:
The May-fly pleasures of a mind at ease.
An early goddess was a country lass:
A charmed Amphion-oak she tripped the grass.
What life was that I lived? The life of these?
Heaven keep them happy! Nature they seem near.
They must, I think, be wiser than I am;
They have the secret of the bull and lamb.
'Tis true that when we trace its source, 'tis beer.
- XIX No state is enviable. To the luck alone
Of some few favoured men I would put claim.
I bleed, but her who wounds I will not blame.
Have I not felt her heart as 'twere my own
Beat thro' me? could I hurt her? heaven and hell!
But I could hurt her cruelly! Can I let
My Love's old time-piece to another set,
Swear it can't stop, and must for ever swell?
Sure, that's one way Love drifts into the mart
Where goat-legged buyers throng. I see not plain:--
My meaning is, it must not be again.
Great God! the maddest gambler throws his heart.
If any state be enviable on earth,
'Tis yon born idiot's, who, as days go by,
Still rubs his hands before him, like a fly,
In a queer sort of meditative mirth.
- XX I am not of those miserable males
Who sniff at vice and, daring not to snap,
Do therefore hope for heaven. I take the hap
Of all my deeds. The wind that fills my sails
Propels; but I am helmsman. Am I wrecked,
I know the devil has sufficient weight
To bear: I lay it not on him, or fate.
Besides, he's damned. That man I do suspect
A coward, who would burden the poor deuce
With what ensues from his own slipperiness.
I have just found a wanton-scented tress
In an old desk, dusty for lack of use.
Of days and nights it is demonstrative,
That, like some aged star, gleam luridly.
If for those times I must ask charity,
Have I not any charity to give?

XXI We three are on the cedar-shadowed lawn;
My friend being third. He who at love once laughed
Is in the weak rib by a fatal shaft
Struck through, and tells his passion's bashful dawn
And radiant culmination, glorious crown,
When 'this' she said: went 'thus': most wondrous she.
Our eyes grow white, encountering: that we are three,
Forgetful; then together we look down.
But he demands our blessing; is convinced
That words of wedded lovers must bring good.
We question; if we dare! or if we should!
And pat him, with light laugh. We have not winced.
Next, she has fallen. Fainting points the sign
To happy things in wedlock. When she wakes,
She looks the star that thro' the cedar shakes:
Her lost moist hand clings mortally to mine.

XXII What may the woman labour to confess?
There is about her mouth a nervous twitch.
'Tis something to be told, or hidden:--which?
I get a glimpse of hell in this mild guess.
She has desires of touch, as if to feel
That all the household things are things she knew.
She stops before the glass. What sight in view?
A face that seems the latest to reveal!
For she turns from it hastily, and tossed
Irresolute steals shadow-like to where
I stand; and wavering pale before me there,
Her tears fall still as oak-leaves after frost.
She will not speak. I will not ask. We are
League-sundered by the silent gulf between.
You burly lovers on the village green,
Yours is a lower, and a happier star!

XXIII 'Tis Christmas weather, and a country house
Receives us: rooms are full: we can but get
An attic-crib. Such lovers will not fret
At that, it is half-said. The great carouse
Knocks hard upon the midnight's hollow door,
But when I knock at hers, I see the pit.
Why did I come here in that dullard fit?
I enter, and lie couched upon the floor.
Passing, I caught the coverlet's quick beat:--
Come, Shame, burn to my soul! and Pride, and Pain--
Foul demons that have tortured me, enchain!
Out in the freezing darkness the lambs bleat.
The small bird stiffens in the low starlight.
I know not how, but shuddering as I slept,
I dreamed a banished angel to me crept:
My feet were nourished on her breasts all night.

- XXIV The misery is greater, as I live!
To know her flesh so pure, so keen her sense,
That she does penance now for no offence,
Save against love. The less can I forgive!
That cruel lovely pallor which surrounds
Her footsteps; and the low vibrating sounds
That come on me, as from a magic shore.
Low are they, but most subtle to find out
The shrinking soul. Madam, 'tis understood
When women play upon their womanhood,
It means, a season gone. And yet I doubt
But I am duped. That nun-like look waylays
My fancy. Oh! I do but wait a sign!
Pluck out the eyes of pride! thy mouth to mine!
Never! though I die thirsting. Go thy ways!
- XXV You like not that French novel? Tell me why.
You think it quite unnatural. Let us see.
The actors are, it seems, the usual three:
Husband, and wife, and lover. She--but fie!
In England we'll not hear of it. Edmond,
The lover, her devout chagrin doth share;
Blanc-mange and absinthe are his penitent fare,
Till his pale aspect makes her over-fond:
So, to preclude fresh sin, he tries rosbif.
Meantime the husband is no more abused:
Auguste forgives her ere the tear is used.
Then hangeth all on one tremendous IF:--
If she will choose between them. She does choose;
And takes her husband, like a proper wife.
Unnatural? My dear, these things are life:
And life, some think, is worthy of the Muse.
- XXVI Love ere he bleeds, an eagle in high skies,
Has earth beneath his wings: from reddened eve
He views the rosy dawn. In vain they weave
The fatal web below while far he flies.
But when the arrow strikes him, there's a change.
He moves but in the track of his spent pain,
Whose red drops are the links of a harsh chain,
Binding him to the ground, with narrow range.
A subtle serpent then has Love become.
I had the eagle in my bosom erst:
Henceforward with the serpent I am cursed.
I can interpret where the mouth is dumb.
Speak, and I see the side-lie of a truth.
Perchance my heart may pardon you this deed:
But be no coward:--you that made Love bleed,
You must bear all the venom of his tooth!

- XXVII Distraction is the panacea, Sir!
I hear my oracle of Medicine say.
Doctor! that same specific yesterday
I tried, and the result will not deter
A second trial. Is the devil's line
Of golden hair, or raven black, composed?
And does a cheek, like any sea-shell rosed,
Or clear as widowed sky, seem most divine?
No matter, so I taste forgetfulness.
And if the devil snare me, body and mind,
Here gratefully I score:--he seemed kind,
When not a soul would comfort my distress!
O sweet new world, in which I rise new made!
O Lady, once I gave love: now I take!
Lady, I must be flattered. Shouldst thou wake
The passion of a demon, be not afraid.
- XXVIII I must be flattered. The imperious
Desire speaks out. Lady, I am content
To play with you the game of Sentiment,
And with you enter on paths perilous;
But if across your beauty I throw light,
To make it threefold, it must be all mine.
First secret; then avowed. For I must shine
Envied,--I, lessened in my proper sight!
Be watchful of your beauty, Lady dear!
How much hangs on that lamp you cannot tell.
Most earnestly I pray you, tend it well:
And men shall see me as a burning sphere;
And men shall mark you eyeing me, and groan
To be the God of such a grand sunflower!
I feel the promptings of Satanic power,
While you do homage unto me alone.
- XXIX Am I failing? For no longer can I cast
A glory round about this head of gold.
Glory she wears, but springing from the mould;
Not like the consecration of the Past!
Is my soul beggared? Something more than earth
I cry for still: I cannot be at peace
In having Love upon a mortal lease.
I cannot take the woman at her worth!
Where is the ancient wealth wherewith I clothed
Our human nakedness, and could endow
With spiritual splendour a white brow
That else had grinned at me the fact I loathed?
A kiss is but a kiss now! and no wave
Of a great flood that whirls me to the sea.
But, as you will! we'll sit contentedly,
And eat our pot of honey on the grave.

XXX What are we first? First, animals; and next
Intelligences at a leap; on whom
Pale lies the distant shadow of the tomb,
And all that draweth on the tomb for text.
Into which state comes Love, the crowning sun:
Beneath whose light the shadow loses form.
We are the lords of life, and life is warm.
Intelligence and instinct now are one.
But nature says: 'My children most they seem
When they least know me: therefore I decree
That they shall suffer.' Swift doth young Love flee,
And we stand wakened, shivering from our dream.
Then if we study Nature we are wise.
Thus do the few who live but with the day:
The scientific animals are they.--
Lady, this is my sonnet to your eyes.

XXXI This golden head has wit in it. I live
Again, and a far higher life, near her.
Some women like a young philosopher;
Perchance because he is diminutive.
For woman's manly god must not exceed
Proportions of the natural nursing size.
Great poets and great sages draw no prize
With women: but the little lap-dog breed,
Who can be hugged, or on a mantel-piece
Perched up for adoration, these obtain
Her homage. And of this we men are vain?
Of this! 'Tis ordered for the world's increase!
Small flattery! Yet she has that rare gift
To beauty, Common Sense. I am approved.
It is not half so nice as being loved,
And yet I do prefer it. What's my drift?

XXXII Full faith I have she holds that rarest gift
To beauty, Common Sense. To see her lie
With her fair visage an inverted sky
Bloom-covered, while the underlids uplift,
Would almost wreck the faith; but when her mouth
(Can it kiss sweetly? sweetly!) would address
The inner me that thirsts for her no less,
And has so long been languishing in drouth,
I feel that I am matched; that I am man!
One restless corner of my heart or head,
That holds a dying something never dead,
Still frets, though Nature giveth all she can.
It means, that woman is not, I opine,
Her sex's antidote, Who seeks the asp
For serpents' bites? 'Twould calm me could I clasp
Shrieking Bacchantes with their souls of wine!

XXXIII 'In Paris, at the Louvre, there have I seen
The sumptuously-feathered angel pierce
Prone Lucifer, descending. Looked he fierce,
Showing the fight a fair one? Too serene!
The young Pharsalians did not disarray
Less willingly their locks of floating silk:
That suckling mouth of his upon the milk
Of heaven might still be feasting through the fray.
Oh, Raphael! when men the Fiend do fight,
They conquer not upon such easy terms.
Half serpent in the struggle grow these worms.
And does he grow half human, all is right.'
This to My Lady in a distant spot,
Upon the theme: While mind is mastering clay,
Gross clay invades it. If the spy you play,
My wife, read this! Strange love-talk, is it not?

XXXIV Madam would speak with me. So, now it comes:
The Deluge or else Fire! She's well; she thanks
My husbandship. Our chain on silence clanks.
Time leers between, above his twiddling thumbs.
Am I quite well? Most excellent in health!
The journals, too, I diligently peruse.
Vesuvius is expected to give news:
Niagara is no noisier. By stealth
Our eyes dart scrutinizing snakes. She's glad
I'm happy, says her quivering under-lip.
'And are not you?' 'How can I be?' 'Take ship!
For happiness is somewhere to be had.'
'Nowhere for me!' Her voice is barely heard.
I am not melted, and make no pretence.
With commonplace I freeze her, tongue and sense.
Niagara or Vesuvius is deferred.

XXXV It is no vulgar nature I have wived.
Secretive, sensitive, she takes a wound
Deep to her soul, as if the sense had swooned,
And not a thought of vengeance had survived.
No confidences has she: but relief
Must come to one whose suffering is acute.
O have a care of natures that are mute!
They punish you in acts: their steps are brief.
What is she doing? What does she demand
From Providence or me? She is not one
Long to endure this torpidly, and shun
The drugs that crowd about a woman's hand.
At Forfeits during snow we played, and I
Must kiss her. 'Well performed!' I said: then she:
' 'Tis hardly worth the money, you agree?'
Save her? What for? To act this wedded lie!

XXXVI My lady unto Madam makes her bow.
The charm of women is, that even while
You're probed by them for tears, you yet may smile,
Nay, laugh outright, as I have done just now.
The interview was gracious: they anoint
(To me aside) each other with fine praise:
Discriminating compliments they raise,
That hit with wondrous aim on the weak point:
My Lady's nose of Nature might complain.
It is not fashioned aptly to express
Her character of large-browed steadfastness.
But Madam says: Thereof she may be vain!
Now, Madam's faulty feature is a glazed
And inaccessible eye, that has soft fires,
Wide gates, at love-time only. This admires
My Lady. At the two I stand amazed.

XXXVII Along the garden terrace, under which
A purple valley (lighted at its edge
By smoky torch-flame on the long cloud-ledge
Whereunder dropped the chariot) glimmers rich,
A quiet company we pace, and wait
The dinner-bell in pre-digestive calm.
So sweet up violet banks the Southern balm
Breathes round, we care not if the bell be late:
Though here and there grey seniors question Time
In irritable coughings. With slow foot
The low rosed moon, the face of Music mute,
Begins among her silent bars to climb.
As in and out, in silvery dusk, we thread,
I hear the laugh of Madam, and discern
My Lady's heel before me at each turn.
Our tragedy, is it alive or dead?

XXXVIII Give to imagination some pure light
In human form to fix it, or you shame
The devils with that hideous human game:--
Imagination urging appetite!
Thus fallen have earth's greatest Gogmagogs,
Who dazzle us, whom we can not revere:
Imagination is the charioteer
That, in default of better, drives the hogs.
So, therefore, my dead Lady, let me love!
My soul is arrowy to the light in you
You know me that I never can renew
The bond that woman broke: what would you have?
'Tis Love, or Vileness! not a choice between,
Save petrification! What does Pity here?
She killed a thing, and now it's dead, 'tis dear.
Oh, when you counsel me, think what you mean!

XXXIX She yields: my Lady in her noblest mood
Has yielded: she, my golden-crown'd rose!
The bride of every sense! more sweet than those
Who breathe the violet breath of maidenhood.
O visage of still music in the sky!
Soft moon! I feel thy song, my fairest friend!
True harmony within can apprehend
Dumb harmony without. And hark! 'tis nigh!
Belief has struck the note of sound: a gleam
Of living silver shows me where she shook
Her long white fingers down the shadowy brook,
That sings her song, half waking, half in dream.
What two come here to mar this heavenly tune?
A man is one: the woman bears my name,
And honour. Their hands touch! Am I still tame?
God, what a dancing spectre seems the moon!

XL I bade my Lady think what she might mean.
Know I my meaning, I? Can I love one,
And yet be jealous of another? None
Commits such folly. Terrible Love, I ween,
Has might, even dead, half sighing to upheave
The lightless seas of selfishness amain:
Seas that in a man's heart have no rain
To fall and still them. Peace can I achieve,
By turning to this fountain-source of wee,
This woman, who's to Love as fire to wood?
She breathed the violet breath of maidenhood
Against my kisses once! but I say, No!
The thing is mocked at! Helplessly afloat,
I know not what I do, whereto I strive.
The dread that my old love may be alive
Has seized my nursling new love by the throat.

XLI How many a thing which we cast to the ground,
When others pick it up becomes a gem!
We grasp at all the wealth it is to them;
And by reflected light its worth is found.
Yet for us still 'tis nothing! and that zeal
Of false appreciation quickly fades.
This truth is little known to human shades,
How rare from their own instinct 'tis to feel!
They waste the soul with spurious desire,
That is not the ripe flame upon the bough.
We two have taken up a lifeless vow
To rob a living passion: dust for fire!
Madam is grave, and eyes the clock that tells
Approaching midnight. We have struck despair
Into two hearts. O, look we like a pair
Who for fresh nuptials joyfully yield all else?

- XLII I am to follow her. There is much grace
In women when thus bent on martyrdom.
They think that dignity of soul may come,
Perchance, with dignity of body. Base!
But I was taken by that air of cold
And statuesque sedateness, when she said
'I'm going'; lit a taper, bowed her head,
And went, as with the stride of Pallas bold.
Fleshly indifference horrible! The hands
Of Time now signal: O, she's safe from me!
Within those secret walls what do I see?
Where first she set the taper down she stands:
Not Pallas: Hebe shamed! Thoughts black as death
Like a stirred pool in sunshine break. Her wrists
I catch: she faltering, as she half resists,
'You love...? love...? love...?' all on an indrawn breath
- XLIII Mark where the pressing wind shoots javelin-like
Its skeleton shadow on the broad-backed wave!
Here is a fitting spot to dig Love's grave;
Here where the ponderous breakers plunge and strike,
And dart their hissing tongues high up the sand:
In hearing of the ocean, and in sight
Of those ribbed wind-streaks running into white.
If I the death of Love had deeply planned,
I never could have made it half so sure,
As by the unblest kisses which upbraid
The full-waked sense; or failing that, degrade!
'Tis morning: but no morning can restore
What we have forfeited. I see no sin:
The wrong is mixed. In tragic life, God wot,
No villain need be! Passions spin the plot:
We are betrayed by what is false within.
- XLIV They say, that Pity in Love's service dwells,
A porter at the rosy temple's gate.
I missed him going: but it is my fate
To come upon him now beside his wells;
Whereby I know that I Love's temple leave,
And that the purple doors have closed behind.
Poor soul! if, in those early days unkind,
Thy power to sting had been but power to grieve,
We now might with an equal spirit meet,
And not be matched like innocence and vice.
She for the Temple's worship has paid price,
And takes the coin of Pity as a cheat.
She sees through simulation to the bone:
What's best in her impels her to the worst:
Never, she cries, shall Pity soothe Love's thirst,
Or foul hypocrisy for truth atone!

- XLV It is the season of the sweet wild rose,
My Lady's emblem in the heart of me!
So golden-crown'd shines she gloriously,
And with that softest dream of blood she glows:
Mild as an evening heaven round Hesper bright!
I pluck the flower, and smell it, and revive
The time when in her eyes I stood alive.
I seem to look upon it out of Night.
Here's Madam, stepping hastily. Her whims
Bid her demand the flower, which I let drop.
As I proceed, I feel her sharply stop,
And crush it under heel with trembling limbs.
She joins me in a cat-like way, and talks
Of company, and even condescends
To utter laughing scandal of old friends.
These are the summer days, and these our walks.
- XLVI At last we parley: we so strangely dumb
In such a close communion! It befell
About the sounding of the Matin-bell,
And, lo! her place was vacant, and the hum
Of loneliness was round me. Then I rose,
And my disordered brain did guide my foot
To that old wood where our first love-salute
Was interchanged: the source of many throes!
There did I see her, not alone. I moved
Toward her, and made proffer of my arm.
She took it simply, with no rude alarm;
And that disturbing shadow passed reproved.
I felt the pained speech coming, and declared
My firm belief in her, ere she could speak.
A ghastly morning came into her cheek,
While with a widening soul on me she stared.
- XLVII We saw the swallows gathering in the sky,
And in the osier-isle we heard them noise.
We had not to look back on summer joys,
Or forward to a summer of bright dye:
But in the largeness of the evening earth
Our spirits grew as we went side by side.
The hour became her husband and my bride.
Love, that had robbed us so, thus blessed our dearth!
The pilgrims of the year waxed very loud
In multitudinous chatterings, as the flood
Full brown came from the West, and like pale blood
Expanded to the upper crimson cloud.
Love, that had robbed us of immortal things,
This little moment mercifully gave,
Where I have seen across the twilight wave
The swan sail with her young beneath her wings.

XLVIII Their sense is with their senses all mixed in,
Destroyed by subtleties these women are!
More brain, O Lord, more brain! or we shall mar
Utterly this fair garden we might win.
Behold! I looked for peace, and thought it near.
Our inmost hearts had opened, each to each.
We drank the pure daylight of honest speech.
Alas! that was the fatal draught, I fear.
For when of my lost Lady came the word,
This woman, O this agony of flesh!
Jealous devotion bade her break the mesh,
That I might seek that other like a bird.
I do adore the nobleness! despise
The act! She has gone forth, I know not where.
Will the hard world my sentence of her share?
I feel the truth; so let the world surmise.

XLIX He found her by the ocean's moaning verge,
Nor any wicked change in her discerned;
And she believed his old love had returned,
Which was her exultation, and her scourge.
She took his hand, and walked with him, and seemed
The wife he sought, though shadow-like and dry.
She had one terror, lest her heart should sigh,
And tell her loudly she no longer dreamed.
She dared not say, 'This is my breast: look in.'
But there's a strength to help the desperate weak.
That night he learned how silence best can speak
The awful things when Pity pleads for Sin.
About the middle of the night her call
Was heard, and he came wondering to the bed.
'Now kiss me, dear! it may be, now!' she said.
Lethe had passed those lips, and he knew all.

L Thus piteously Love closed what he begat:
The union of this ever-diverse pair!
These two were rapid falcons in a snare,
Condemned to do the flitting of the bat.
Lovers beneath the singing sky of May,
They wandered once; clear as the dew on flowers:
But they fed not on the advancing hours:
Their hearts held cravings for the buried day.
Then each applied to each that fatal knife,
Deep questioning, which probes to endless dole.
Ah, what a dusty answer gets the soul
When hot for certainties in this our life!--
In tragic hints here see what evermore
Moves dark as yonder midnight ocean's force,
Thundering like ramping hosts of warrior horse,
To throw that faint thin line upon the shore!

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Beach, Joseph Warren. The Comic Spirit of George Meredith. New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1911.
- _____. "Meredith," The Concept of Nature in Nineteenth Century Poetry. New York: The MacMillan Company, 1936. pp. 470-499.
- Brewer, Edward V. "Influences of Jean Paul Richter on George Meredith's Conception of the Comic," Journal of English and German Philology, XXIX (1930), pp. 243-256.
- Brownell, William Crary. "George Meredith," Victorian Prose Masters. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1918. pp. 233-289.
- Burdett, Osbert. "George Meredith," Critical Essays. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1926. pp. 16-32.
- Butcher, Lady A. M. Memories of George Meredith. London: Constable and Company Ltd., 1919.
- Clodd, Edward. "George Meredith," Memories. London: Watts & Co., 1926. pp. 138-164.
- Colvin, Sir Sidney. "Box Hill and George Meredith," Memories and Notes of Persons and Places, 1852-1912. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1921. pp. 162-188.
- Cunliffe, John William. "George Meredith," English Literature During the Last Half-Century. New York: The MacMillan Company, 1919. pp. 16-36.
- _____. Leaders of the Victorian Revolution. New York, London: D. Appleton-Century Company Incorporated, 1934. pp. 207-215.
- _____. "Modern Thoughts in Meredith's Poems," Publications of the Modern Language Association, XXVII (1912), pp. 1-25.
- Ellis, S. M. George Meredith: His Life and Friends. New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1920.

- Esdaile, Arundell. A Chronological List of George Meredith's Publications, 1849-1911. London: Constable and Company, Ltd., 1914.
- Fain, John Tyree. "Meredith and the Cuckoo Song," Modern Language Notes, LXVI (1951), pp. 324-326.
- Fernandez, Ramon. "The Message of Meredith," Messages. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1927. pp. 153-190.
- Figgis, Darrell. "George Meredith: The Philosopher in the Artist," Studies and Appreciations. London: J. M. Dent and Sons, Ltd., 1912. pp. 169-198.
- Follet, Helen Thomas. "George Meredith," Some Modern Novelists. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1918, pp. 23-49.
- Forman, Maurice Buxton. A Bibliography of the Writings in Prose and Verse of George Meredith. Edinburgh: The Dunedin Press, 1922.
- Hammerston, Sir J. A. George Meredith in Anecdote and Criticism. London: Grant Richards, 1909.
- Harris, May. "A Note on George Meredith," Sewanee Review, XXXI (1923), pp. 346-352.
- Henderson (Gretton), M.S. George Meredith, Novelist, Poet, Reformer. London: Methuen & Co., 1908.
- _____. The Writings and Life of George Meredith. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1926.
- Jackson, Holbrook. "George Meredith," Great English Novelists. London: Grant Richards, n.d., pp. 281-312.
- Meredith, George. An Essay on Comedy. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1909.
- _____. The Poetical Works of George Meredith. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1912.
- _____. The Works of George Meredith. 29 vols. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1909.
- Nelson, Elizabeth T. "Comic Spirit as Critic," Sewanee Review XXXIV (1926), pp. 131-142.
- Petter, Guy B. George Meredith and his German Critics. London: H. F. & G. Witherby Ltd., 1939.

- Photiades, Constantin. George Meredith, his Life, Genius and Teachings. Translated by Arthur Price. London: Constable and Company, Limited, 1913.
- Quiller-Couch, Sir Arthur T. "The Poetry of George Meredith," Studies in Literature. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1918. pp. 168-188.
- Russell, Frances Theresa. "Laurel for George Meredith," South Atlantic Quarterly, XXVII (1928), pp. 367-375.
- Sassoon, Siegfried. Meredith. New York: The Viking Press, 1948.
- Scott, Dixon. "George Meredith's Letters," Men of Letters. London: Hadder and Stoughton Ltd., 1923, pp. 238-244.
- Sencourt, Robert Esmande. The Life of George Meredith. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1929.
- Stevenson, Lionel. "George Meredith," Darwin Among the Poets. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1932. pp. 183-236.
- Symons, Arthur. "A Note on George Meredith," Studies in Prose and Verse. New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., 1922, pp. 143-151.
- Tenney, Charles Dewey, "Rose-pink and Dirty Drab; George Meredith as a Critic," Sewanee Review, XXXIX (1931), pp. 407-18.
- Thomson, James. James Thomson ("B.V.") on George Meredith. London: Privately Printed, 1909.
- Trevelyan, G. M. The Poetry and Philosophy of George Meredith. London: Constable and Company Ltd., 1916.
- Woods, Alice. George Meredith as Champion of Women and Progressive Education. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1937.